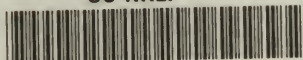


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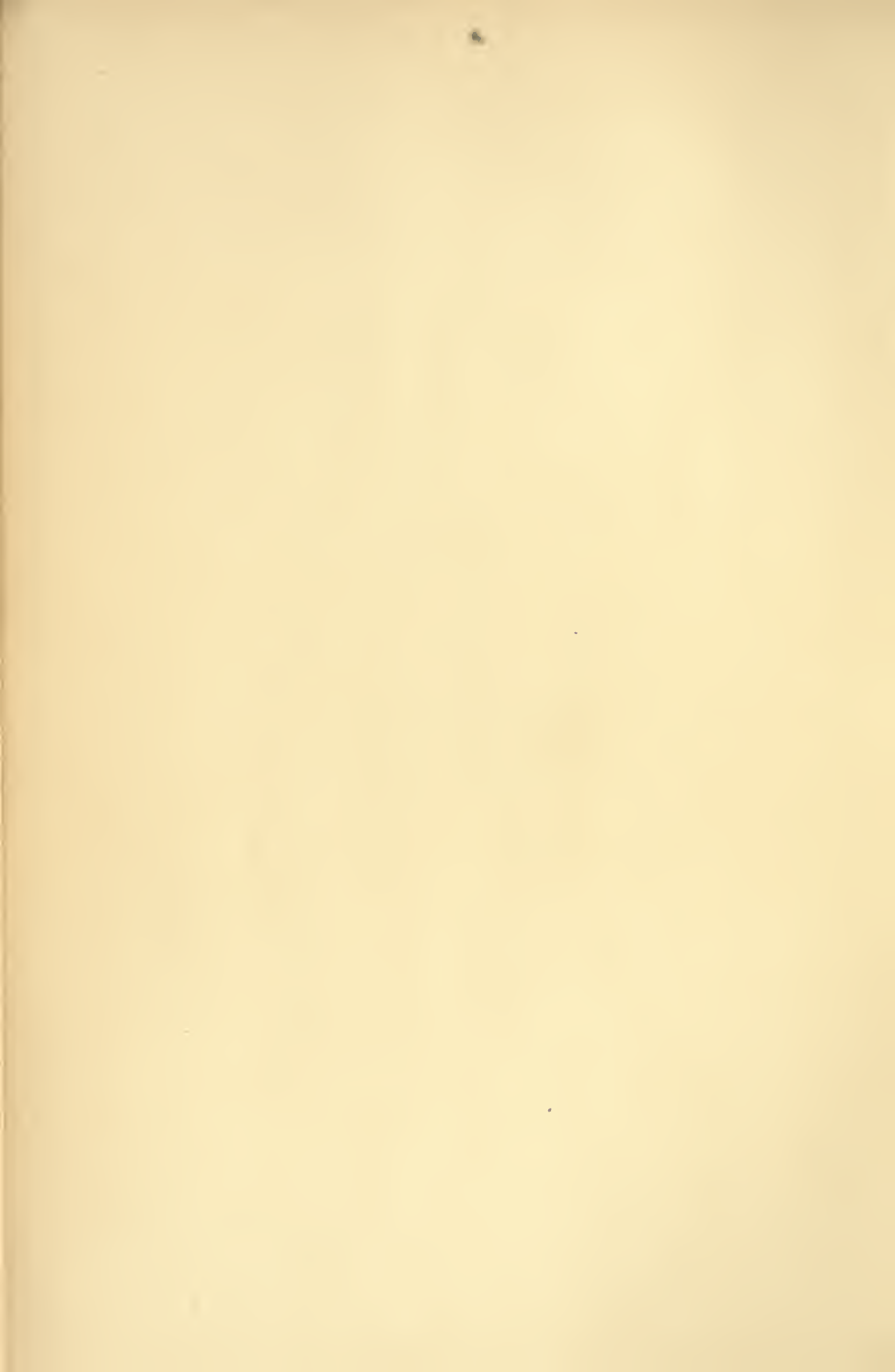
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Stops of Various
Quills



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STOPS OF VARIOUS QVILLS



By W·D·HOWELLS

*Illustrated by
Howard
Pyle*



NEW YORK

HARPER AND BROTHERS

MDCCCXCV

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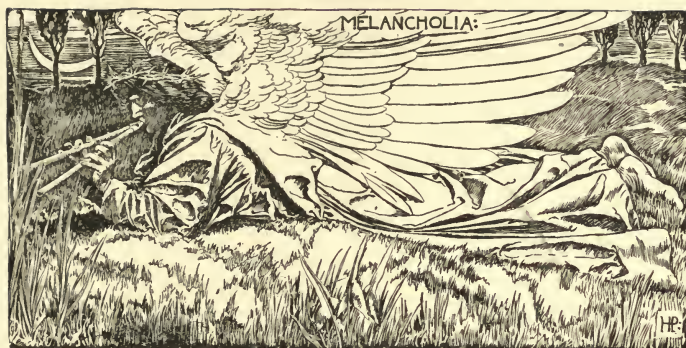


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NOVEMBER

Impression



WEFT of leafless spray
 Woven fine against the gray
 Of the autumnal day,
 And blurred along those ghostly garden tops
 Clusters of berries crimson as the drops
 That my heart bleeds when I remember
 How often, in how many a far November,
 Of childhood and my children's childhood I was
 glad,
 With the wild rapture of the Fall,
 Of all the beauty, and of all
 The ruin, now so intolerably sad.







MIDWAY



O blithe the birds sang in the trees,
The trees sang in the wind,
I winged me with the morning breeze,
And left Care far behind.

But now both birds and trees are mute
In the hot hush of noon;
And I must up and on afoot,
Or Care will catch me soon.







TIME



O you wish me, then, away?
 You should rather bid me stay:
 Though I seem so dull and slow,
 Think before you let me go!

Whether you entreat or spurn
 I can nevermore return:
 Times shall come, and times shall be,
 But no other time like me.

Though I move with leaden feet,
 Light itself is not so fleet;
 And before you know me gone
 Eternity and I are one.







FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

I



INNOCENT spirits, bright, immaculate
ghosts!
Why throng your heavenly hosts,
As eager for their birth
In this sad home of death, this sorrow-haunted
earth?

Beware! Beware! Content you where you are,
And shun this evil star,
Where we who are doomed to die,
Have our brief being and pass, we know not where
or why.

II

*We have not to consent or to refuse;
It is not ours to choose:
We come because we must,
We know not by what law, if unjust or if just.*

*The doom is on us, as it is on you,
That nothing can undo;
And all in vain you warn:
As your fate is to die, our fate is to be born.*





THE BEWILDERED GUEST



WAS not asked if I should like to come.
I have not seen my host here since I
came,
Or had a word of welcome in his name.
Some say that we shall never see him, and some
That we shall see him elsewhere, and then know
Why we were bid. How long I am to stay
I have not the least notion. None, they say,
Was ever told when he should come or go.
But every now and then there bursts upon
The song and mirth a lamentable noise,
A sound of shrieks and sobs, that strikes our joys
Dumb in our breasts; and then, some one is gone.
They say we meet him. None knows where or
when.
We know we shall not meet him here again.







COMPANY



THOUGHT, "How terrible, if I were seen
Just as in will and deed I had always been!
And if this were the fate that I must face
At the last day, and all else were God's grace,
How must I shrink and cower before them there,
Stripped naked to the soul and beggared bare
Of every rag of seeming!" Then, "Why, no,"
I thought, "Why should I, if the rest are so?"







HEREDITY



THAT swollen paunch you are doomed to
bear
Your gluttonous grandsire used to wear;
That tongue, at once so light and dull,
Wagged in your grandam's empty skull;
That leering of the sensual eye
Your father, when he came to die,
Left yours alone; and that cheap flirt,
Your mother, gave you from the dirt
The simper which she used upon
So many men ere he was won.

Your vanity and greed and lust
Are each your portion from the dust
Of those that died, and from the tomb
Made you what you must needs become.
I do not hold you aught to blame
For sin at second hand, and shame:
Evil could but from evil spring;
And yet, away, you charnel thing!





TWELVE P.M.



O get home from some scene of gayety,
Say a long dinner, and the laugh and joke,
And funny story, and tobacco smoke,
And all the not unkindly fatuousness
Of fellow-beings not better and not worse
Than others are, but gorged with course on
course,
And drenched with wine; and with one's
evening dress
To take off one's perfunctory smile, and be
Wholly and solely one's sheer self again—
Is like escaping from some dull, dumb pain;
And in the luxury of that relief,
It is, in certain sort and measure, as if
One had put off the body, and the whole
Illusion of life, and in one's naked soul
Confronted the eternal Verity.







CHANGE

SOMETIMES, when after spirited debate
Of letters or affairs, in thought I go
Smiling unto myself, and all aglow
With some immediate purpose, and elate
As if my little, trivial scheme were great,
And what I would so were already so:
Suddenly I think of her that died, and know,
Whatever friendly or unfriendly fate
Befall me in my hope or in my pride,
It is all nothing but a mockery,
And nothing can be what it used to be,
When I could bid my happy life abide,
And build on earth for perpetuity,
Then, in the deathless days before she died.



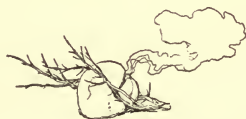




IN THE DARK



OW often, when I wake from sleep at night,
I search my consciousness to find the ill
That has lurked formlessly within it, still
Haunting me with a shadowy affright;
And try to seize it and to know aright
Its vague proportions, and my frantic will
Runs this way and runs that way, with a thrill
Of horror, to all things that ban or blight!
Then, when I find all well, it is as though
The moment were some reef where I had crept
From the wide waste of danger and of death,
And for a little I might draw my breath
Before the flood came up again, and swept
Over it, and gulfed me in its deeps below.







TO-MORROW



OLD fraud, I know you in that gay disguise,
That air of hope, that promise of surprise:
Beneath your bravery, as you come this
way,

I see the sordid presence of To-day;
And I shall see there, long ere you are gone,
All the dull Yesterdays that I have known.







LIVING



OW passionately I will my life away
Which I would give all that I have to stay;
How wildly I hurry, for the change I crave,
To hurl myself into the changeless grave!







IF



ES, death is at the bottom of the cup,
And every one that lives must drink it up;
And yet between the sparkle at the top
And the black lees where lurks that bitter
drop,

There swims enough good liquor, Heaven knows,
To ease our hearts of all their other woes.

The bubbles rise in sunshine at the brim;
That drop below is very far and dim;
The quick fumes spread and shape us such bright
dreams

That in the glad delirium it seems
As though by some deft sleight, if so we willed,
That drop untasted might be somehow spilled.





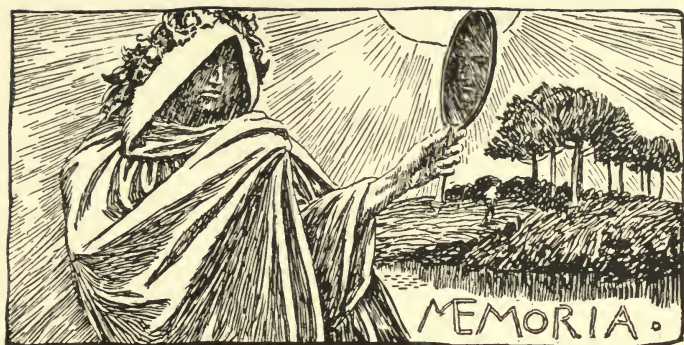


SOLITUDE

AH, you cannot befriend me, with all your
love's tender persistence!
In your arms' pitying clasp sole and re-
mote I remain,
Rapt as far from help as the last star's measureless
distance,
Under the spell of our life's innermost mystery,
Pain.







RESPITE



DROWSING, the other afternoon, I lay
In that sweet interlude that falls between
Waking and sleeping, when all being is
seen
Of one complexion, and the vague dreams play
Among the thoughts, and the thoughts go astray
Among the dreams. My mother, who has been
Dead almost half my life, appeared to lean
Above me, a boy, in a house far away,
That once was home, and all the troubled years
That have been since were as if they were not.
The voices that are hushed were in my ears,
The looks and motions that I had forgot
Were in my eyes; and they disowned the tears
That now again beneath their lids are hot.











QUESTION

SHALL it be after the long misery
 Of easeless pillows, and the waste of flesh
 In sickness, till some worn and widening
 mesh
 Frays out at last, and lets the soul go free?
 Or, shall some violent accident suddenly
 Dismiss it, or some black cloud in the brain
 Lower till life maddens against life amain?
 Where, in what land, or on what lonely sea?
 When, in the light of what unrisen sun?
 Under what fatal planet? There is none
 Can tell, or know aught but that it shall be:
 The one thing certain which all other things
 Have taught my being in its inmost springs
 To feel the sole impossibility.







HOPE



WE sailed and sailed upon the desert sea
Where for whole days we alone seemed to
be.

At last we saw a dim, vague line arise
Between the empty billows and the skies,
That grew and grew until it wore the shape
Of cove and inlet, promontory and cape;
Then hills and valleys, rivers, fields, and woods,
Steeple and roofs, and village neighborhoods.
And then I thought, "Sometime I shall embark
Upon a sea more desert and more dark
Than ever this was, and between the skies
And empty billows I shall see arise
Another world out of that waste and lapse,
Like yonder land. Perhaps—perhaps—perhaps!"







THE BURDEN



WRITHED beneath my bur-
den, fumed and groaned.
My burden that had felt and
heard me, moaned:
“You do not know what misery is,
nor what
The bitterest part is of our common
lot.
The strength I load in you with my
loath weight,
My weakness would so gladly own
its fate.
Think, once, how much more dread-
ful it must be
To be the burden than bear it, and
pity me!”







CALVARY



If He could doubt on His triumphant cross,
How much more I, in the defeat and loss
Of seeing all my selfish dreams fulfilled,
Of having lived the very life I willed,
Of being all that I desired to be?
My God, my God! Why hast thou forsaken me?







CONSCIENCE



JUDGE me not as I judge myself, O Lord!
Show me some mercy, or I may not live:
Let the good in me go without reward;
Forgive the evil I must not forgive!







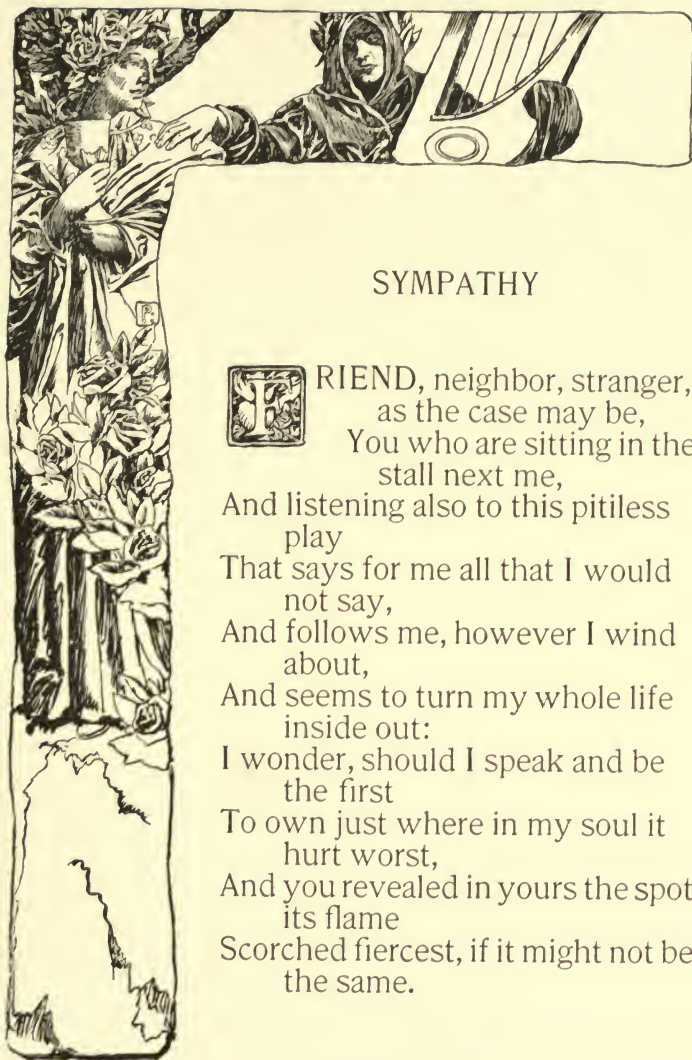
REWARD AND PUNISHMENT



YOU are the best and the worst of everything
you require.
If you have looked on shame willingly,
yours is the shame.
You are the evil you mean, and you are the good
you desire;
You shall be for yourself both the praise and the
blame.







SYMPATHY



FIEND, neighbor, stranger,
as the case may be,
You who are sitting in the
stall next me,
And listening also to this pitiless
play
That says for me all that I would
not say,
And follows me, however I wind
about,
And seems to turn my whole life
inside out:
I wonder, should I speak and be
the first
To own just where in my soul it
hurt worst,
And you revealed in yours the spot
its flame
Scorched fiercest, if it might not be
the same.





STATISTICS



O many men, on such a date of May,
Despaired and took their hopeless lives
away

In such an area, year after year;
In such another place, it would appear
The assassinations averaged so and so,
Through August after August, scarce below
A given range; and in another one,
March after March, it seems there were undone
So many women still about the same,
With little varying circumstance in their shame;
Burglaries, arsons, thefts, and forgeries
Had their own averages as well as these;
And from these figures science can discern
The future in the past. We but return
Upon our steps, although they seem so free.
The thing that has been is that which shall be.



Dark prophet, yes! But still somehow the round
Is spiral, and the race's feet have found
The path rise under them which they have trod.
Your facts are facts, yet somewhere there is God.



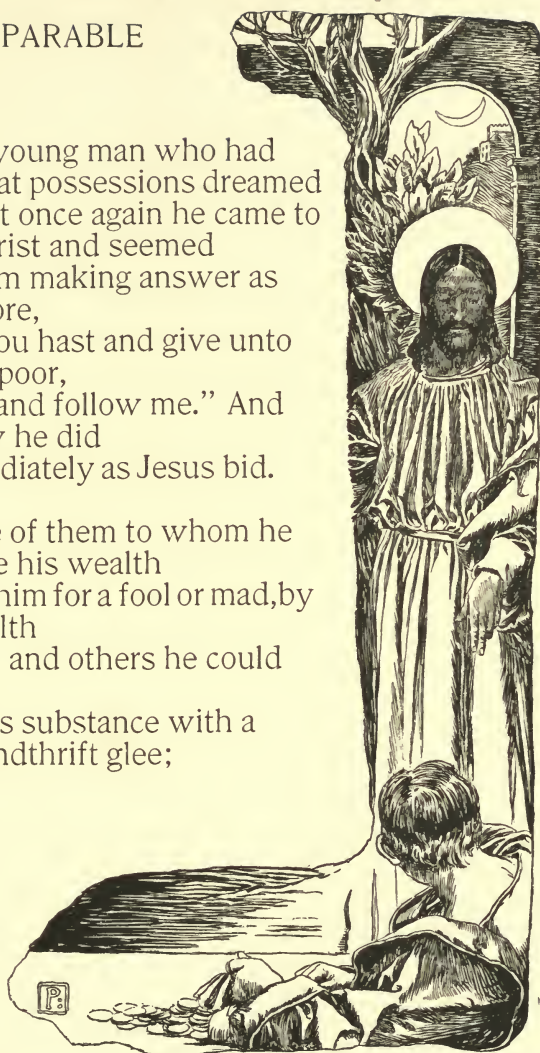


PARABLE



HE young man who had
great possessions dreamed
That once again he came to
Christ and seemed
To hear Him making answer as
before,
“Sell all thou hast and give unto
the poor,
And come and follow me.” And
now he did
In all immediately as Jesus bid.

Then some of them to whom he
gave his wealth
Mocked at him for a fool or mad, by
stealth
Or openly; and others he could
see
Wasting his substance with a
spendthrift glee;





And others yet were tempted, and drawn in
The ways of sin that had not dreamed of sin:
Others, besides, that took were robbed and killed:
Some that had toiled their whole lives were un-
willed

By riches, and began the life accurst
Of idleness, like rich men from the first.
Some hid his money in the earth, a root
From which should grow a flower of deadly fruit;
Some kept, and put it out at usury,
And made men slaves with it that had been free.

The young man's dream was broken with his
grief,
And he awoke to his immense relief,
And wept for joy, and cried, "He could not know
What dire results from His behests would flow!
I must not follow Him, but I can fulfil
The spirit, if not the letter, of His will.





Seeing the things I have been shown in sleep,
I realize how much better 'twere to keep
The means that Providence has bestowed on me,
Doubtless for some wise purpose, and to be
The humble agency and instrument
Of good to others not intelligent
Enough to use the gifts of God aright."
He rose up with a heart at peace, and light;
And thenceforth none of the Deserving Poor
Ever went empty-handed from his door.







VISION

WITHIN a poor man's squalid home I stood:
The one bare chamber, where his work-
worn wife
Above the stove and wash-tub passed her
life,
Next the sty where they slept with all their brood.
But I saw not that sunless, breathless lair,
The chamber's sagging roof and reeking floor;
The smeared walls, broken sash, and battered
door;
The foulness and forlornness everywhere.


I saw a great house with the portals wide
Upon a banquet room, and, from without,
The guests descending in a brilliant line
By the stair's statued niches, and beside
The loveliest of the gemmed and silken rout
The poor man's landlord leading down to
dine.







SOCIETY

 I LOOKED and saw a splendid pageantry
Of beautiful women and of lordly men,
Taking their pleasure in a flowery plain,
Where poppies and the red anemone,
And many another leaf of cramoisy,
Flickered about their feet, and gave their stain
To heels of iron or satin, and the grain
Of silken garments floating far and free,
As in the dance they wove themselves, or strayed
By twos together, or lightly smiled and bowed,
Or curtsied to each other, or else played
At games of mirth and pastime, unafraid
In their delight; and all so high and proud
They seemed scarce of the earth whereon they
trod.





II

I looked again and saw that flowery space
Stirring, as if alive, beneath the tread
That rested now upon an old man's head
And now upon a baby's gasping face,
Or mother's bosom, or the rounded grace
Of a girl's throat; and what had seemed the red
Of flowers was blood, in gouts and gushes shed
From hearts that broke under that frolic pace.
And now and then from out the dreadful floor
An arm or brow was lifted from the rest,
As if to strike in madness, or implore
For mercy; and anon some suffering breast
Heaved from the mass and sank; and as before
The revellers above them thronged and prest.







GOOD SOCIETY



YES, I suppose it is well to make some sort of
exclusion,
Well to put up the bars, under whatever
pretence;
Only be careful, be very careful, lest in the con-
fusion
You should shut yourself on the wrong side of
the fence.



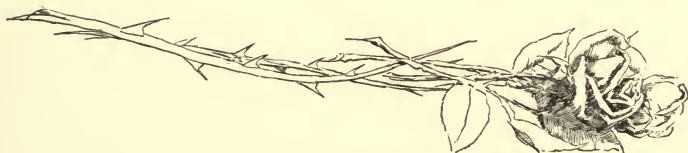




FRIENDS AND FOES



BITTER the things one's enemies will say
Against one sometimes when one is away,
But of a bitterness far more intense
The things one's friends will say in one's
defence.











SPHINX



WE who are nothing but self, and have no
manner of being
Save in the sense of self, still have no
other delight
Like the relief that comes with the blessed obliv-
ion freeing
Self from self in the deep sleep of some dream-
less night.

Losing alone is finding; the best of being is ceas-
ing
Now and again to be. Then at the end of this
strife,
That which comes, if we will it or not, for our re-
leasing,
Is it eternal death, or is it infinite life?







MATERIALS OF A STORY



I MET a friend of mine the other day
 Upon the platform of a West End car;
 We shook hands, and my friend began
 to say
 Quickly, as if he were not going far,
 "Last summer something rather in your way
 Came to my knowledge. I was asked to see
 A young man who had come to talk with me
 Because I was a clergyman; and he
 Told me at once that he had served his time
 In the state-prison for a heinous crime,
 And was just out. He had no friends, or none
 To speak of; and he seemed far gone





With a bad cough. He said he had not done
The thing. They all say that. You cannot tell.
He might not have been guilty of it. Well,
What he now wanted was some place to stay,
And work that he could do. I managed it
With no great trouble. And then, there began
The strangest thing I ever knew. The man,
Who showed no other signs of a weak wit,
Was hardly settled in his place a week
When he came round to see me, and to speak
About his lodging. What the matter was
He could not say, or would not tell the cause,
But he must leave that place; he could not bear
To stay. I found another room, but there
After another week he could not stay.
Again I placed him, and he came to say
At the week's end that he must go away.
So it went on, week after week, and then
At last I made him tell me. It appears
That his imprisonment of fifteen years
Had worn so deep into the wretch's brain
That any place he happened to remain
Longer than one day in began to seem
His prison and all over again to him;
And when the thing had got into this shape,
He was quite frantic till he could escape.
Curious, was not it? And tragical.”
“Tragical? I believe you! Was that all?



What has become of him?" "Oh, he is dead.
I told some people of him, and we made
A decent funeral for him. At the end
It came out that his mother was alive—
An outcast—and she asked our leave to attend
The ceremony, and then asked us to give
The silver coffin plate, carved with his name,
And the flowers, to her." "That was touching.

She
Had some good left her in her infamy."
"Why, I don't know! I think she sold the things,
Together with a neck-pin and some rings
That he had left, and drank.... But as to blame....
Good-morning to you!" and my friend stepped
down
At the street crossing. I went on up town.







THE KING DINES

Impression



WO people on a bench in Boston Com-
mon,
An ordinary laboring man and woman,
Seated together,
In the November weather
Slit with a thin, keen rain;
The woman's mouth purple with cold and pain,
And her eyes fixed as if they did not see
The passers trooping by continually,
Smearing the elm leaves underfoot that fall
Before her on the miry mall;
The man feeding out of the newspaper
Wrapped round the broken victuals brought
with her,
And gnawing at a bent bone like a dog,
Following its curve hungrily with his teeth,
And his head twisted sidewise; and beneath
His reeking boots the mud, and the gray fog
Fathomless over him, and all the gloom
Of the day round him for his dining-room.





LABOR AND CAPITAL

Impression



SPITEFUL snow spit through the bitter
day
In little stinging pellets gray,
And crackling on the frozen street
About the iron feet,
Broad stamped in massy shoes
Sharpened and corked for winter use,
Of the huge Norman horses plump and round,
In burnished brass and shining leather bound,
Dragging each heavy fetlock like a mane,
And shaking as they pull the ponderous wain
With wheels that jar the ground
In a small earthquake, where they jolt and grind,
And leave a span-wide track behind:



And hunched upon the load
Above the Company's horses like a toad,
All hugged together
Against the pitiless weather,
In an old cardigan jacket and a cap
Of mangy fur,
And a frayed comforter
Around his stiffened chin, too scant to wrap
His purple ears,
And in his blinking eyes what had been tears,
But that they seemed to have frozen there ere
 they ran,
The Company's man.







EQUALITY



HE beautiful dancing-women wove their
maze,
With many a swift lascivious leer and
lure
For the hot theatre, whose myriad gaze
Burned on their shamelessness with eyes im-
pure.

Then one that watched unseen among them—
dread,
Mystical, ineffable of presence—said,
“Patience! And leave me these poor wanton ones:
Soon they shall lie as meek and cold as nuns;
And you that hire them here to tempt your lust
Shall be as all the saints are, in the dust.”





JUDGMENT DAY

BEFORE Him weltered like a shoreless sea
The souls of them that had not sought to be,
With all their guilt upon them, and they
cried,

They that had sinned from hate and lust and pride,
“Thou that didst make us what we might become,
Judge us!” The Judge of all the earth was dumb;
But high above them, in His sovereign place,
He lifted up the pity of His face.







MORTALITY



OW many times have I lain down at night,
And longed to fall into that gulf of sleep
Whose dreamless deep
Is haunted by no memory of
The weary world above;
And thought myself most miserable that I
Must impotently lie
So long upon the brink
Without the power to sink.
Into that nothingness, and neither feel nor think!

How many times, when day brought back the
light
After the merciful oblivion
Of such unbroken slumber,
And once again began to cumber
My soul with her forgotten cares and sorrows,
And show in long perspective the gray morrows,
Stretching monotonously on,
Forever narrowing but never done,
Have I not loathed to live again and said,
It would have been far better to be dead,
And yet somehow, I know not why,
Remained afraid to die!





ANOTHER DAY



NOTHER day, and with it that brute joy,
Or that prophetic rapture of the boy
Whom every morning brings as glad a
breath
As if it dawned upon the end of death!

All other days have run the common course,
And left me at their going neither worse
Nor better for them; only, a little older,
A little sadder, and a little colder.

But this, it seems as if this day might be
The day I somehow always thought to see,
And that should come to bless me past the scope
And measure of my farthest-reaching hope.



To-day, maybe, the things that were concealed
Before the first day was, shall be revealed,
The riddle of our misery shall be read,
And it be clear whether the dead are dead.

Before this sun shall sink into the west
The tired earth may have fallen on his breast,
And into heaven the world have passed away...
At any rate, it is another day!







SOME ONE ELSE



IVE my life over? I would rather not.
Though I could choose, perhaps, a fairer
lot,
I cannot hope I should be worthier it,
Or wiser by experience any whit.
Being what I am, I should but do once more
The things that brought me grief and shame
before.
But I should really fancy trying again
For some one else who had lived once in vain:
Somehow another's erring life allures;
And were I you, I might improve on yours.







LIFE



ONCE a thronged thoroughfare that wound
afar
By shining streams, and waving fields and
woods,
And festal cities and sweet solitudes,
All whither, onward to the utmost star:

Now a blind alley, lurking by the shore
Of stagnant ditches, walled with reeking crags,
Where one old heavy-hearted vagrant lags,
Footsore, at nightfall limping to Death's door.







WEATHER-BREEDER




H, not to know that such a happiness
To be wished greater were to be made less;
That one drop more must make it spill in .
tears
Of agony that blisters and that sears;
That the supreme perfection of thy bliss
Alone could mother misery like this!







PEONAGE

OW tired the Recording Angel must begin
To be of setting down the same old sin,
The same old folly, year out and year in,
Since I knew how to err, against my name!
It makes me sick at heart and sore with shame
To think of that monotony of blame,
For things I fancied once that I should be
Quits with in doing; but at last I see
All that I did became a part of me,
And cannot be put from me, but must still
Remain a potent will within my will,
Holding me debtor, while I live, to ill.







RACE

I



LEAVE me here those looks of yours!
All those pretty airs and lures:
Flush of cheek and flash of eye;
Your lips' smile and their deep dye;
Gleam of the white teeth within;
Dimple of the cloven chin;
All the sunshine that you wear
In the summer of your hair;
All the morning of your face;
All your figure's wilding grace;
The flower-pose of your head, the light
Flutter of your footsteps' flight:
I own all, and that glad heart
I must claim ere you depart.



II

Go, yet go not unconsoled!
Sometime, after you are old,
You shall come, and I will take
From your brow the sullen ache,
From your eyes the twilight gaze
Darkening upon winter days,
From your feet their palsy pace,
And the wrinkles from your face,
From your locks the snow; the droop
Of your head, your worn frame's stoop,
And that withered smile within
The kissing of the nose and chin:
I own all, and that sad heart
I will claim ere you depart.

III

I am Race, and both are mine,
Mortal Age and Youth divine:
Mine to grant, but not in fee;
Both again revert to me
From each that lives, that I may give
Unto each that yet shall live.







TEMPERAMENT



HERE love and hate, honor and infamy,
Change and dissolve away, and cease
to be;

Where good and evil in effect are one
In the long tale of years beneath the sun;
Where like the face a man sees in a glass
And turns from, character itself shall pass—
Out of the mystery whence we came we bring
One thing that is the one immutable thing,
Through which we fashion all that we do here,
Which is the body of our hope and fear,
The form of all we feel and all we know,
The color of our weal and of our woe,
And which alone, it may be, we shall bear
Back to that mystery when we go there.







WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT?



If I lay waste and wither up with doubt
The blessed fields of heaven where once
my faith
Possessed itself serenely safe from death;
If I deny the things past finding out;
Or if I orphan my own soul of One
That seemed a Father, and make void the place
Within me where He dwelt in power and grace,
What do I gain by that I have undone?





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